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## **HISTORY OF THE GALLATIN COUNTY SALINES.**

BY JACOB W. MYERS.

Tradition has it that from time immemorial salt has been produced and manufactured at the salt springs in Gallatin County, on the Saline River, near the present town of Equality. There is much evidence to bear out the truth of the tradition. In and around the region of the two principal springs is found a kind of pottery or earthenware whose existence can be explained in no other way than that it is fragments of large pots or kettles used in evaporating the salt water. Later on the early settlers used iron kettles of a size and shape similar to the ones used by the Indians, made of clay. The settlers got their idea of that kind of kettle from the theory that the Indians made use of the large earthenware kettles for salt making. Many farmers in that locality possess some of these old iron kettles today, which they use for various purposes.

The two principal springs are known as the "Half Moon Lick" and "Nigger Spring." <sup>(1)</sup> Besides the pottery found in this region, there have been found various Indian relics, such as arrow heads, tomahawks, vases and other similar articles. The earliest known English people to settle in this locality came about 1800 or 1802. <sup>(2)</sup> They found these familiar relics and this specie of pottery unlike that found in other localities. This pottery seems, because of its shape, to be fragments of large kettles or pans.

Professor McAdams <sup>(3)</sup> describes these pans as being from three to five feet in diameter. He found two whole ones used as a casket, near St. Genevieve, Missouri.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The spring is also called "Nigger Well," "Nigger Furnace" due probably to the fact that slaves were worked there.

<sup>(2)</sup> Smith, G. W., Salines of Southern Illinois. Transactions Ill. State Hist. Society 1904, page 246.

<sup>(3)</sup> Report of Ill. Board, World's Fair Comm. 1893, page 283.

Local tradition has it that the French and Indians made salt there previous to the coming of the English in 1800. It is reasonably certain that the French understood the process and that Indians knew the locality of the springs. An English gentleman writing, in 1770, to the Earl of Hillsborough <sup>(4)</sup> remarked on the abundance of the salt springs in the region of Wabash and Saline Rivers.

It is, indeed, certain that someone was making salt before the English came. A short sketch of Illinois published in 1837 says: <sup>(5)</sup> "The principal spring was formerly possessed by the Indians, who valued it highly and called it the Great Salt Spring; and it appears probable from a variety of circumstances that they had been long acquainted with the method of making salt. Large fragments of earthenware are continually found near the salt works, both on and under the surface of the ground. They have an impression of basket and wicker work."

There has been some controversy between scientists concerning how these kettles or pans were made, but all are agreed that they were used in salt making.

It is rather impossible to say just how long before the coming of the English into this region it was that salt was made. But Capt. Thos. Hutchins, <sup>(6)</sup> writing in 1778, twenty-two years before that time says: "The Wabash abounds with salt springs. Any quantity of salt may be made from them in a manner now done in the Illinois Country."

This evidence it seems is sufficient to prove that salt was made several years before the English came into the region. Indeed, if we may judge anything from the amount of broken pottery, concerning the length of time salt was made here, we would say that it was several years before there is any record of it being made. Mr. Geo. E. Sellars <sup>(7)</sup> of Gallatin County visited the place in 1854 and he says

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(4) Smith, G. W., *Salines of Southern Illinois*. Transactions Ill. State Hist. Society, 1904, page 246.

(5) Ellsworth, Hon. H. L., Ill. in 1837. A Sketch. Page 27.

(6) *Topographical Description of Va.*, page 54.

(7) *Popular Science Monthly*, Vol. 11, page 573.

that there was an abundance of this pottery all about the springs. On a cultivated ridge above the spring he found acres actually covered. This particular ridge of which he speaks is just south of the spring. His theory is that the salt brine was carried up there and let the water evaporate. Probably there was no timber on this ridge and it presented a better position for carrying on the process of evaporation. The writer of this article remembers passing through that region a few years ago and seeing fragments of this pottery sticking in the banks on either side of the road where it had been worn down by travel and erosion. Some of these fragments were five or six feet in the ground. So evidently the process had been carried on several years before we have a record of it.

On March 1, 1784, Virginia ceded all her lands north of the Ohio river to the general government, except a reservation for bounty lands. With this cession went the salt springs, that is they became the property of the United States. It took some little time to get the territorial government into operation. On March 3, 1803, Congress authorized the Secretary of the Treasury to lease the salt springs and licks for the benefit of the government. Hamilton, then Secretary of the Treasury instructed Harrison, Governor of Indiana Territory, to lease the springs and licks. In the summer of 1803 Governor Harrison leased the salines on Saline River to a Captain Bell of Lexington, Kentucky. Bell was probably working the salines there before this time by permission of the Indians, because Reynolds <sup>(8)</sup> says the first white man to settle in Shawneetown was Michael Spinkle who came in 1802, and about the same time came a Frenchman, La Boisiere who settled there and ran a ferry to accommodate people who were coming out of Kentucky to the salt works of Saline River.

Captain Bell worked till the end of 1806 when John Bates of Jefferson County, Kentucky, leased the works, and he worked there till in 1808 when Isaac White became lessee.

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(8) Reynolds, *Pioneer History of Illinois*, page 93.

An Act of Congress of March 26, 1804, provided among other things that "all salt springs, licks, wells with the necessary land adjacent thereto were reserved from sale as the property of the United States." The territorial governor was authorized to lease these salt wells and springs to the best interests of the general government. April 30, 1804, Governor Harrison appointed Isaac White of Vincennes to be government agent and reside at the works and collect the revenue due the United States. He assumed his duties and was assisted by John Marshall who probably resided at Shawneetown. Where White resided is not definitely known, but probably at the "Nigger well" <sup>(9)</sup>.

On Sept. 8, 1806, White became Captain of the Knox County Militia and perhaps gave up his duties as agent, because the records show that he himself became a lessee in 1808. How long he held the lease is not exactly known, but not later than the early part of 1810, for a letter of March 13, shows that H. Butler was lessee at that time. <sup>(10)</sup>

Professor Smith <sup>(11)</sup> in his article says that in 1811 Captain White sold his interests in the salt works to three men, Jonathan Taylor of Randolph County, Illinois, Charles Wilkins and James Morrison of Lexington, Kentucky. I do not know where he gets his authority for this statement and can reconcile his statement with the letter of Butler only on the grounds that perhaps the "Nigger Spring" and "Half Moon Lick" were leased separately.

From the beginning of 1808 to 1811 Leonard White <sup>(12)</sup> seems to have been government agent and later on seems to have become interested in saltmaking himself. On March 7, 1809 <sup>(13)</sup> Ninian Edwards was commissioned Governor of Illinois, and at the same time became superintendent of the United States Salines. As superintendent it was his duty to make all contracts for leasing the salt works, to collect the

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(9) Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1904, page 248.

(10) Butler to Edwards, Chicago Hist. Collections III, page 49.

(11) Transactions, 1904, page. 49.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Edwards, N. W. Life and Times of Ninian Edwards, page 30.

rent, and provide for the shipment and sale of the salt which was delivered to the government in lieu of cash rent. The rental <sup>(14)</sup> of all the salines in Illinois demanded by the government was ten per cent of the salt produced. From certain conditions which were required to be inserted in the leases we see that the amount would not be under 12,000 bushels annually and might be more.

I will not quote the conditions in full that were to be inserted in each contract. There were six sections of these conditions. <sup>(15)</sup> The lessee was to make annually 120,000 bushels of salt. There was a penalty of one bushel for each bushel short of this and the penalty was secured by a constant deposit of salt in the hands of the United States agent. The rent was to be paid quarterly in salt, calculated upon the basis of 120,000 bushels. Conditions were to be introduced to prevent the waste of timber and to encourage the use of coal; to encourage which the superintendent was authorized to diminish the rent. The superintendent could lease the works to one or more companies, but no lessee could be engaged directly or indirectly with any other salt works.

Attempts were made to lessen the fuel and to make use of coal as well as wood. H. Butler <sup>(16)</sup> while he was lessee made an experiment with "air furnaces to reduce the amount of fuel used". In his letter to Edwards he said, "I also have a proposition to make in regard to manufacture of salt with coal, altogether". The government had promised to pay for permanent improvements made by lessee, and Butler expected to receive pay for these improvements, and the proposition he wished to make was concerning what he should receive if the experiment with coal was successful. I do not know whether he ever carried out the experiment.

The problem of securing fuel was a great one, because of the distance it had to be hauled. As the timber was cleared away the furnaces were moved back farther and farther from the wells and the brine was piped by means of hollow logs or

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<sup>(14)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1905, page 357.

<sup>(15)</sup> Edwards, *History of Illinois*, page 31.

<sup>(16)</sup> Butler to Edwards Chicago Hist. Coll., vol. 3, page 50.

pipes made by boring four inch holes through the logs lengthwise. These were joined end to end, but the joints were not always tight and there was much loss from leakage. It has been estimated that over one hundred <sup>(17)</sup> miles of such piping was laid from 1800 to 1873. They were considered as improvements and no doubt there was some graft in the pipe lines. Many old pipes were taken up and relaid as new for which the government paid as permanent improvement. When one lessee took over from another all pipe lines were put in as improvements.

In 1812 Congress took action to provide that the timber would not give out. The President was authorized to reserve not less than one township of the land around the salt works from sale. A committee composed of Leonard White, Willis Hargrave and Phillip Trammel made a commission to select lands to be reserved as the "Saline Reservation". They selected 96,766.79 <sup>(18)</sup> acres. A little later Mr. Sloo <sup>(19)</sup> made an inspection tour and added 84,000 acres more to it.

From 1807 to August 26, 1818, the entire rental accruing to the United States from the Salines on Saline River was 158,394 bushels and the total cash turn over, for the same time was \$28,165.25. The importance of this saline may be shown by the fact that during the same time Ohio turned in only \$240.00 while Indiana, Kentucky and Missouri made no returns.

April 18, 1818, <sup>(20)</sup> Congress passed the Enabling Act, enabling the people of Illinois to form a constitution. Section 6, part 2, says, "all salt springs within such state and the land reserved for the use of the same shall be granted to the said state, for the use of said state, and the same to be used under such conditions and regulations, as the Legislature of said state shall direct; Provided, the Legislature shall never sell, nor lease the same for a longer period than ten years, at any one time". Thus when Illinois was admitted as a state

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<sup>(17)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1904, page 254.

<sup>(18)</sup> Transactions Ill. State Hist. Society, 1904, page 249.

<sup>(19)</sup> Mr. Sloo was registrar of the Shawneetown Land District.

<sup>(20)</sup> Blue Book of Illinois, 1907, page 81.

the valuable salt works became the property of the state. At that time there were five distinct leases of salt wells and springs from the United States to individuals, made by Ninian Edwards representing the government, and all bearing the date of 1817. These leases were; <sup>(21)</sup> (1) Willis Hargrave and Meridith Fisher; (2) Jonathan Taylor; (3) George Robinson; (4) James Ratcliff; (5) Timothy Guard.

The Legislature which met at Kaskaskia in the winter of 1818-19 authorized the Governor to continue the leases with these men. The benefit of certain unexpired leases of the United States Government from August 26, 1818, to June 19, 1820, fell to the state.

During the early history of salt making the manufacturers relied only upon the natural springs, but later they bored wells. It is impossible to say how many of these wells were bored, but there was probably as many as a half dozen, for we find that in 1817 there were made five distinct leases. The first wells were not very deep, but later ones were made deeper. Timothy Guard, one of the lessees of 1817, dug a deep well at the "Half Moon Lick" about 1825. The well was dug about sixty feet deep and walled up, and then a boring made in the bottom. This well furnished a fine quantity of brine and was used till 1854. Mr. Guard quit the salt making in 1830.

About the year 1854 a company <sup>(22)</sup> was formed to make salt on a larger scale than ever before. The company was composed of Stephen R. Rowen, Andrew McAllen, Challon Guard, Abner Flanders, Broughton Temple and Joseph J. Castle. They bored another deep well, and expended a great deal of money in preparing the plant. The company broke up and Temple and Castle became the sole owners of the plant. They proceeded with the construction of the plant and installed an outfit of the best type. The iron kettles were superceded by large iron pans twelve to twenty feet wide and sixty or more feet in length. There were three

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<sup>(21)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, page 251.

<sup>(22)</sup> Transactions, State Hist. Soc., 1904, 255. Some of this material I have gotten from old settlers who know about the salt works of this period.



rows of such pans connected with one smoke stack. Coal which had been discovered at a nearby hill was now used entirely for fuel, and a tram-way was built from the mine to the furnace. Thus the mine was modern in all its features.

Temple and Castle owned and operated the mine from 1854 to 1873. They are said to have made five hundred bushels every twenty-four hours. About the beginning of 1873 they thought the brine could be transported easier than the fuel, so they started to build a larger and newer plant nearer the coal mine. The work of construction was started but hard times, caused by the panic of 1873, came on and work stopped. Salt became cheaper when the crisis had passed over and they never finished the new plant. In the course of time the machinery was removed and nothing but the old coal mine marks the site of the new plant.

Thus ended one of the great industries developed during the early history of the state. At one time, before the development of steamboat navigation on the Mississippi River, the surrounding country had to rely upon its own production of salt, because it was too far and expensive to transport it from New Orleans by packhorse and the other earlier methods of transportation. Most of the salt was produced at the Gallatin County Saline. St. Louis and Kaskaskia were made distributing points.

How long the state remained in control of the salt works, or whether it controlled till the end in 1873, I have been unable to find out from what material I have been able to secure.

The price of salt varied. This was due of course to several reasons. At first it was sold for \$1.50 per bushel. By an Act of Congress, approved July 30, 1813, <sup>(23)</sup> a duty of twenty cents per bushel was laid upon imported salt, which enabled the home manufacturers to supply the demand at a better price. In 1822 <sup>(24)</sup> the price of salt was reported to have fallen from \$1.25 to fifty cents per bushel, because of

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<sup>(23)</sup> U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. 3, page 49.

<sup>(24)</sup> Niles Register XXII, page 112.

discovery of copious and strong wells. In 1828 <sup>(25)</sup> an official report of the superintendent of the Gallatin County Salines stated that about 100,000 bushels of salt were made annually and sold at from twenty to thirty cents per bushel. In 1830 <sup>(26)</sup> Congress reduced the duty on salt to fifteen cents per bushel, and after December 31, 1831, it was to be only ten cents. So the price was regulated mainly by new discoveries and by import duties.

It is difficult to tell exactly how much salt was produced here at the Gallatin County Saline. The amount varied at different times. In 1814 Samuel J. Mills, <sup>(27)</sup> a missionary from Connecticut, wrote in his report that 3,600 bushels were made each week. This would make 187,200 bushels annually. In 1819 <sup>(28)</sup> an indefinite statement was made to the effect that from 200,000 to 300,000 bushels were made annually, and sold at from fifty to seventy-five cents per bushel. In 1809 <sup>(29)</sup> we find that one of the conditions in the contract for rental of the works was that not less than 120,000 bushels should be produced annually. Later on Temple and Castle are reported to have made 500 bushels every twenty-four hours. The brine was very strong from the new well and a great deal could be made from it.

There were salines in Vermilion County, the Big Muddy Saline, and a saline at St. Genevieve, Missouri, but the Gallatin County Saline produced more than all the others combined.

When wood was used as fuel large tracts of land were reserved from sale to be used in connection with the industry. All this land was given over to the state when Illinois Territory became a state, on condition that it should never sell any part of the land. But later on the central government authorized the state to sell some of the land. An Act of Congress <sup>(30)</sup> May 24, 1828, authorized the sale of 30,000

<sup>(25)</sup> House Journal Illinois, 1828-9, page 63.

<sup>(26)</sup> U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. 4, page 419.

<sup>(27)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1915, page 273.

<sup>(28)</sup> McKenzle View of U. S. 1819, page 298.

<sup>(29)</sup> Edwards, N. W., Life and Times of Ninian Edwards, page 30.

<sup>(30)</sup> U. S. Statutes at Large, Vol. 4, page 305.

acres. Another Act of January 19, 1832, <sup>(31)</sup> authorized the sale of an additional 20,000 acres. The proceeds of these sales were to be applied to whatever the state should direct. The total amount of land reserved was 180,766 acres. I have been unable to find whether all the land was sold or not, but there is today in that locality some land known as the "reservation." I do not know how much there is of it or to whom the title belongs. I do not know when all the land was sold or whether some of it still belongs to the state. These facts my material does not show.

So far in this paper I have discussed various phases of the salt industry and manufacture. There is one phase that I have left for the last, but not without a purpose. This is the question of slavery in connection with the manufacture of salt.

Philip Francis Renault, <sup>(32)</sup> as agent for the company of St. Phillips, introduced the first slaves into the Illinois country. In 1720 he purchased five hundred slaves in St. Domingo and transported them to Illinois to work in the mines. However, mining did not prove successful here and many were employed in Missouri and Iowa, while a portion of them were purchased by the French settlers, and the offsprings of these formed a great part of the slave population of Illinois down to the time of the election of Governor Coles.

The Ordinance of 1787 prohibited slavery in the Northwest Territory, of which Illinois was a part. This caused the settlers some little trouble and they complained and threatened to move to Missouri, so to pacify them it was agreed that those then holding slaves could continue to hold them.

In 1805 the Legislature of Indiana passed a law which permitted the bringing in of slaves to work "within the tract of land reserved for use of the salt works near Shawneetown." They could not be permanently held here but were

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<sup>(31)</sup> U. S. Statutes at Large, vol. 4, page 496.

<sup>(32)</sup> Blanchard, Rufus, Hist. of Illinois, page 139. Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1907, page 148.

hired to persons by their owners for a certain length of time. This law provided <sup>(33)</sup> that slaves over fifteen years of age might be brought in from slave states and within thirty days the owners might enter into an agreement with the said slave by which the slave agreed to work in Illinois for a stated time for a consideration, if within the thirty days the slave refused to enter into such an agreement the owner had thirty days in which to return him to a slave state. It seems as though this was especially favorable to the salt works on the Saline River Reservation and evidently many slaves were employed there. Some of the men of to-day living in the region of the salt works say that at one time nearly all the work was done by slaves. <sup>(34)</sup> Certain it is that some slaves were employed there. Timothy Guard purchased some slaves in Tennessee and brought them in to work there. One of these slaves, Elliot by name, purchased his own freedom, and later that of some of his relatives. Mr. Elliot's son is now living near Equality and has yet his manumission papers in Timothy Guard's own hand writing. I do not know whether he actually paid \$1,000.00 or whether he was given his freedom when he had earned that much for Mr. Guard, and was given it as a consideration for working in Illinois. It is probably the latter which he did, for he would likely have no chance to earn any money himself. But for his brothers and mother he paid cash because he was then free to earn his own money and the price he paid was much smaller than for himself.

The Constitution of 1818 provided that no slaves should be brought in, thereafter, except such as should be used under a contract to labor at the salt works near Shawneetown. The contract was limited to one year, but it was renewable. However, no slaves were to be brought in after 1825. The constitution further provided that any violation of this act would "effect the emancipation of such person from his obligation of service." All indentures entered into without fraud or collusion prior to making of the constitution, ac-

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<sup>(33)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1904, page 250.

<sup>(34)</sup> See also Transactions 1905, page 357.

according to laws of the territory, were to be held valid and the persons so "indented" were to be held to a fulfillment of the agreement in the contract. Indentures made after 1818 were not valid unless the person indenting himself was in a state of freedom at the time of making the contract. Indentures made by negroes and mulattoes were valid for only one year. These last two statements might lead one to think that there were white person indented, but I was unable to find any record of such.

The interpretation of the constitutional provision was elastic enough to include the Big Muddy Saline <sup>(35)</sup> "within the tract reserved for the salt works near Shawneetown" and slaves were used at that saline.

Slave labor, under these restrictions, was not so profitable or economical as one at first glance might think. The lessee had to pay a liberal hire, board and clothe, and give medical attention to the slaves; was responsible for their safe keeping, and had to return them to their owners before the expiration of each year to prevent their constitutional emancipation. They could return them under a new contract, but each time they had to actually be returned to their owners and then brought back from the slave states. This was expensive and a great waste of time and money. Because of this I do not believe there were so very many slaves used. There may have been several free negroes who indented themselves.

In the two counties of Randolph <sup>(36)</sup> and Gallatin in 1820 there were precisely five hundred slaves. After 1825 slavery was entirely prohibited and those negroes working at the salt works were either indented or were paid wages the same as any one else.

In this paper I have, with the materials at hand, tried to trace out the history of one of the earliest and largest industries of the pioneers of the southern part of the state. Today there remains only a few signs of the once great en-

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<sup>(35)</sup> Transactions, Ill. State Hist. Society, 1905, page 357.

<sup>(36)</sup> Boggess, A. C., Chicago Hist. Society's Collections, Vol. 5, page 173.

terprise, and the traveler passing through the region could easily miss them.

The paper is by no means complete, nor do I claim to be accurate in every detail. I have done what I could with the materials at hand. Perhaps if I had had more time I might have gained much information from interviews with certain men at Shawneetown and Equality. Perhaps an interview with Mr. Elliot would reveal much concerning slavery. But I have done as best I can with the materials at hand.

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